

The response reproduced below was submitted to the consultation held by the Nuffield Council on Bioethics on the ethics of research involving animals during October-December 2003. The views expressed are solely those of the respondent(s) and not those of the Council.

This response was submitted using the online facility:

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QUESTIONS ANSWERED:

1. Background: the use of animals in research

ANSWER:

Animal testing is regarded as the industry standard for new products. It is essential that more research & development is invested in the alternative methods and that they are given priority over animal testing. Can results from research using animals be transferred to humans – Procedures such as techniques for organ transplants can be tested across species but the differences between species means that animal testing cannot be reliably accurate. Primates (supposedly the closest match in animal testing to humans) are not reliable models for human neurological conditions such as Alzheimers & Parkinsons disease; for example we cannot map the effect of these diseases on speech on to primates. One medicine, Fortekor made by Novartis, is prescribed to cats for kidney problems but to dogs for heart problems, this indicates the variations between species & the inherent problems in animal testing for human purposes.

2. Genetically modified animals

ANSWER:

Genetically modified animals raise more forcefully the issue of animals being regarded & used as a commodity, but the same issue is relevant to all animal experimentation. When creatures are created using genetic modification we have to be aware of the risks should the wider population be exposed to the modified genes, particularly where species have been crossed, possibly giving rise to unanticipated complications. It is not right to create animals to suffer from specific diseases, I believe this is a moral & ethical issue.

3. Alternatives

ANSWER:

It is essential that further research & funds are invested alternative methods to animal experimentation and that these methods are strongly promoted. There has to be an incentive to change the focus of experimentation. Given that animal testing is mandatory for new drugs –there is no incentive to increase research using alternatives to animals. I have been particularly concerned at the strong support given by the government to the Primate Centre at Cambridge. This does not indicate that the alternatives are being seriously considered. It is important to have an independent body to oversee research with the aim of reducing the duplication of research.

4. Ethical issues

ANSWER:

Regardless of the legal status for animal's rights, I do not believe it is morally right that humans should use animals for experimentation in ways which we would not use a fellow human. I believe there are moral differences in status between different animals, but I believe no animal should be caused suffering. It is not unreasonable to apply the idea of suffering to animals. Pain is measurable in an animal's reaction, it is not necessary to have the concept described in words. Stress is measurable in the physical

body. Happiness is harder to assess, as it is a subjective state. Possibly the aim should be for an absence of stress indicators. I am against the application of invasive procedures to discover how animals experience the world. The research is important, but must be done in a way which does not increase animal suffering.

5. The regulations

ANSWER:

It is very difficult for 25 inspectors to effectively monitor the large numbers of animal research centres, and the even larger numbers of animal experimentation projects – there is a need for more inspectors to ensure the standards set by UK regulations are met. Welfare assessments should be made throughout a project both externally & within the project. With regard to genetically modified animals, it is important that they should be licensed. The numbers of animals used in GM should be identified separately to animals bred & used in other research. It would be sensible to introduce regulations for GM animals; the current regulations were never intended to cover such an area. Its important to have an external review & controls for GM breed development.

6: Providing information to the public

ANSWER:

In order to judge whether specific research involving animals is acceptable its necessary to know the aim of the research, whether alternative methods of research were considered or were appropriate, whether the research was covering ‘new ground’, the types of animals used, the welfare considerations and the experiments carried out. It would be possible to provide information to the public via the internet, in articles published in journals such as ‘Nature’ and through government publications. I would not trust information produced by bodies with a vested interest in gaining acceptance for the research carried out. This would include pharmaceutical companies & government. I would trust the views of a committee made up of members with a balanced mix of views – both pro and anti animal experimentation. Medicines using animal experimentation should clearly state this. There should be an indication of when experiments were carried out, the animals used & the specific tests used.